

# Potatoes Cooked for Dinner

by Sutapa Chaudhuri (November 2015)

In mustard oil, with poppy-seed paste  
and diced Jack-fruit seeds. A sprinkle  
of salt and turmeric over the cubed greens,  
a dash of five-spices, or garlic, in the hot,  
sizzling oil, swirling in the pan—

Pervading the darkened room, the aroma  
of burnt chillies and mixed spices float  
aimless; choked up, the vent-air chimneys  
cough wheezy. Nostalgia and lost homelands  
well up, crowding the eyes, watery and dim

with tears. A streak of sadness, alone and  
groping, sightless amidst the habit of formal,  
early dinners, hides silent in the thick richness  
of a pungent, virgin oil, strong and flavourful.

Its temper cannily mellowed by the soothing

poppy, and a steaming white, jasmine rice. The  
well-known aroma of a home-cooked comfort

and the secure warmth of the scented rice on  
the designer dining table, spice up stale talk on  
everyday matters; in some unheeded corner hide

the pale, washed out memories of long-gone

forgotten childhoods, a game of devious

hide and seek in the dark alleys of lost lives.

Suddenly, the silence shatters, an intrepid ring

of the cell-phone shreds at once the cumbersome

monotone of a solitary loneliness. The well-loved

tune of a beloved poet calls me back to life. Intimate,

the ringtone sings of eternal friendships on rainy

Shravana nights. The well-lit exchange of wishes, and

casual enquiries of well-being end in an innocuous

swapping of stories, known and unknown. Treasured recipes

roll out slick, masked in an informal, acquired imitation.

Lost connections and ghost lives haunt in myriad forms;

secretive, the tongue grows accustomed to lies, as I try,

haltingly, to translate my life to your eager ears.

The present lies obliterated; forever enveloped in darkness.

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Sutapa Chaudhuri has two poetry collections – *Broken Rhapsodies* and *Touching Nadir. My Lord, My Well-Beloved* is a collection of her translations of Rabindranath Tagore's songs.

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